

the affairs of the House. But no improvement was made on the chronicles of previous ages, although in the outside world Froissart was setting up a new and better standard. Walsingham is no improvement on Matthew of Paris, and his view of the affairs of Church and State is far less interesting. The monastic chronicler had no ability to grasp the relative importance of events ; what is insignificant is told in detail, what is all-important is casually mentioned. To this rule there is indeed occasionally an exception; to the absence of literary merit there is none.

The monk was not habitually or even frequently a man of vicious life. The literature of the day has not more to say against him than against every one else. Although, when he was allowed outside the cloister wall on business or pleasure, he had not a good reputation, contemporaries supposed that the inner life of the monastery was respectable.¹ A certain relaxation of the very strict rules under which the inhabitants were nominally living was of course very general, and probably prevented more violent outbreaks. There was no strong ascetic movement going forward to fill the abbeys with furious self-torturing devotees such as had founded the harsh Carthusian order, such as were again to astonish Europe in the age of Ignatius Loyola. That the ordinary prior was fond of field sports, that the ordinary monk was fond of good food, is probably a safe generalisation.² But few men are averse to these indulgences, although few, perhaps, had then such opportunities for enjoying them in return for so little exertion on their part. It was the uselessness, not the wickedness, of the monk's life that angered other men. Langland seems to have thought little positive harm of monastic society, but he looked forward with approval and certainty to the day when * the Abbot of Abingdon and all his issue for ever, shall have a knock of a King and incurable the wound.¹³ Neither was Wycliffe's attack on the monks so bitter, nor so loaded with charges of wickedness, as his attack on the friars. But he declared life in the world to be better than life in the cloister,

¹ Compare *P. PL.*, 0, vii. 151-63 to *P. PL.*, C, vi. 157-72; see Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* for the monk abroad; Cutts, 90.

* Monk in Chaucer's *Cant. Tales*; *P. PL.*, B, x. 305-12, and *Vov Clam.*, bk. iv. cap. 2. ^{yl.} * *P. PL.*, B, x. 321-9. ^{157-70;}